

# UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR)

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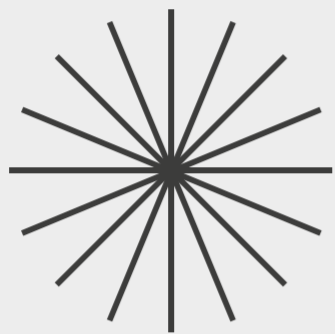
A practical guide for civil society coalitions to engage in implementation mechanisms



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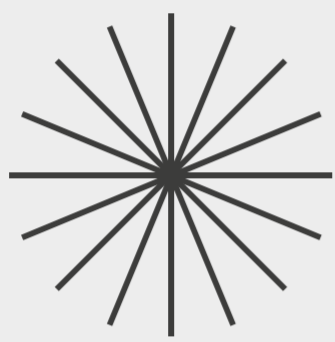
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The **Institute for Development and Human Rights - IDDH** is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, created in June 2004. Its mission is to strengthen civic space and democracy, especially in Brazil and Latin America, through international actions on human rights.



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The **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)** is the oldest political foundation in Germany with a rich tradition in social democracy dating back to its founding in 1925. It is a non-profit institution active in Germany and around the world. With an international network of offices in more than 100 countries, FES advocates a policy of peaceful coexistence and human rights, promotes the establishment and consolidation of democratic, social and constitutional structures, and paves the way for free trade unions and a strong civil society. Geneva serves as a liaison between the United Nations in Geneva, other Geneva-based international organizations, FES country offices, and partners in developing countries.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS



**ECOSOC** – United Nations Economic and Social Council

**HRC** – Human Rights Council

**NHRIs** – National Human Rights Institutions

**NMIRF** – National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up

**OHCHR** – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

**SuR** - State under Review

**UN** – United Nations

**UPR** – Universal Periodic Review

## FOREWORD



The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Geneva Office would like to thank the Institute for Development and Human Rights (IDDH) for authoring this important publication on how to engage with mechanisms to implement human rights on a national level. We acknowledge the thorough work of the research team in synthesizing the vast amount of data and analyzing promising practices, largely based on their experience of coordinating the UPR Brazil Coalition since 2017. Following a first publication “UPR: A practical guide for civil society to build national coalitions”, this second guide will serve as a tool for those coalitions to meaningfully engage with national mechanisms. It is the hope of the FES that these two guides together will empower civil society to create a real impact in advancing human rights in their country and globally.

## Message from Fernanda Lapa, Executive Director of IDDH



As we approach twenty years since the establishment of the Human Rights Council and the creation of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism within the United Nations, we are pleased to publish this second practical guide, designed to encourage civil society to continue occupying civic space, even amid a global crisis of multilateralism.

The first guide sought to inspire the creation or strengthening of national collectives around the world so that, through engagement with international mechanisms, they could advance the promotion and protection of human rights in their respective territories. To this end, we proposed three steps that civil society actors may adopt for such coordination, and we closely followed the establishment of national collectives—such as the UPR Brazil Coalition (2017)—as well as the first collective operating at the regional level, the UPR Latin America Coalition (2021).

Throughout the twenty years in which IDDH has been training and convening diverse civil society groups to expand social participation in strategic spaces for human rights advocacy, both nationally and internationally, one certainty has remained: our voices resonate farther and our impact grows stronger when we act in a coordinated and collective manner.

We recognize that States differ in how they ensure and promote social participation within their institutions. For this reason, this guide begins by outlining our understanding of social participation within a State that defines itself as democratic.

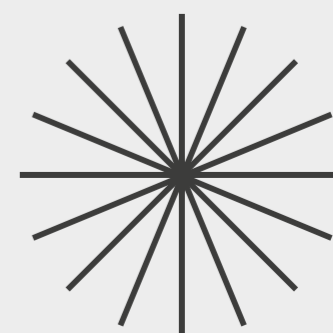


This second guide presents the ways in which an already-established civil society coalition can engage throughout all stages of a UPR cycle. As a periodic and systematic mechanism, the UPR enables civil society to remain engaged throughout nearly the entire five-year cycle, rather than only during the reporting phase, as was often expected in the past.

At present, the focus has shifted to the implementation of UPR recommendations, given that what matters most is seeing these documents transformed into concrete human rights policies within territories. Consequently, the range of actors able to engage with this mechanism has expanded. Beyond State executive bodies, civil society, and the United Nations—traditionally involved in the preparation of the State under Review’s reports—we now see, for example, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), universities, businesses, justice systems, and parliamentarians (local and national) being encouraged to engage with international recommendations. And why is that? Precisely because the primary focus is no longer solely on monitoring and reporting, but on implementation!

For this reason, we have included a dedicated section on National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRFs or SIMOREs), which are being developed by States around the world to support the tracking, monitoring, and implementation of international human rights recommendations. We highlight these mechanisms so that civil society is aware that this is also a strategic space—one that must be transparent, accessible, and participatory.

We hope that, with these two guides now available in Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English, civil society across continents will be increasingly able to act in a coordinated and collective manner to continue confronting the many human rights challenges that persist in affecting humanity.



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# 01

## INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY COALITIONS





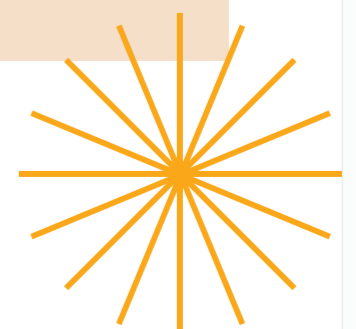
**Human rights**, both in the domestic and international spheres, are “expressions of concrete struggles embedded in specific historical and political contexts, a political agenda in dispute” (HERRERA FLORES, 2009). However, it is common to see the term “human rights” applied without reference to its nature as the result of historical struggles and achievements. This dissociation generates, among other consequences, the distancing of the notion of human rights from people’s daily lives and contributes to their denial precisely to those who are most excluded, exploited, and discriminated against.

To make human rights effective, it is essential to empower these social actors so they can actively intervene in decision-making processes that affect their lives. This implies reversing the historical logic of denying rights by promoting conditions for traditionally marginalized voices to occupy spaces of expression and power. This path requires decolonizing critical thinking, building inclusive and diversity-respecting societal projects, fostering creative and liberating processes, and revitalizing utopia as a horizon for resistance and collective action. Thus, social empowerment becomes an essential strategy to expand participation and consolidate more just and plural democratic practices (WOLKMER, 2019, p. 2717).

Social participation is nothing more than the exercise of citizenship beyond suffrage or indirect representation. It refers to the involvement of people/communities in public policies. There are different levels of social participation, such as:

**a)** mere information – a passive and unilateral relationship of transmitting information to citizens;

**b)** consultation/“opportunistic participation” – in which governments actively seek people’s participation but through a partially inclusive relationship; and

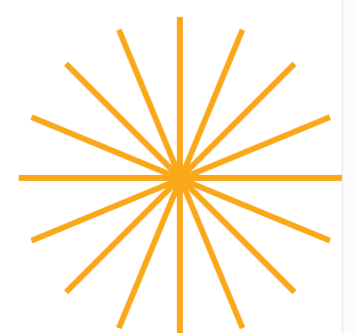


**c)** the desired active participation – in which broad dialogue takes place for the design, planning, and implementation of policies, in a bilateral relationship (UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA, 2013).

This desired level of participation can be labeled in different ways — such as popular participation, free and meaningful citizen participation, or active participation — but at its core, it represents pluralism within an “interactive and flexible dynamic of an open, shared, and democratic public space” (WOLKMER, 2006, p. 171).

Active social participation, as we refer to it here, not only enables citizen engagement in all stages of public policies but also ensures that actions directed toward the public interest are prioritized over those that benefit only a few groups. Additionally, it fosters greater trust in governments, empowers citizens to express their opinions and concerns, and forms a foundation for promoting citizenship and democracy itself.

Even as a broad concept, a minimal definition of democracy must reject both autocratic power - with citizen participation in public decisions as a prerequisite - and monocratic power - ensuring political pluralism, diverse centers of power distributed socially, and the highest possible level of social participation in deliberations concerning each individual (BOBBIO, 1999, p. 22). In other words, strengthening and expanding democracy necessarily includes promoting greater social participation, freedom of dissent, and the expansion of bottom-up power - that exercised at all levels (local, regional, national), by individuals themselves as citizens (BOBBIO, 1986, p. 32).



Within the United Nations, social participation appears from the UN Charter itself, which assigns the Economic and Social Council the role of organizing forms of consultation with civil society (Article 71 of the UN Charter and ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31).

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993) recognizes that democracy depends on the full and free participation of individuals in defining their political, economic, social, and cultural systems.<sup>1</sup> Both collective self-determination and inclusion in decision-making processes are essential to strengthening democracy and human rights. Therefore, ensuring democracy and human rights requires guaranteeing active and equal participation by historically excluded groups - such as women, people of African descent, and persons with disabilities - in all aspects of social life, highlighting non-discrimination and inclusion as fundamental conditions for an effective democracy.

Within the Human Rights Council, the set of resolutions on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law is notable, reaffirming, among other aspects, that democracy is based on the freely expressed will of the people - that is, on social participation.<sup>2</sup>

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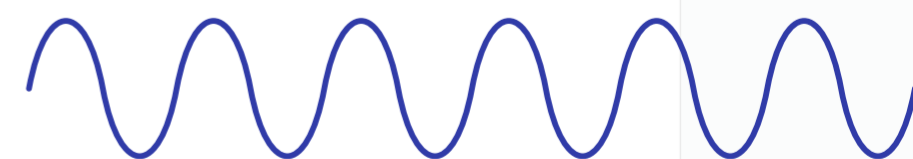
<sup>1</sup> Democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Democracy is based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives. In the context of the above, the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels should be universal and conducted without conditions attached. The international community should support the strengthening and promoting of democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the entire world. Special attention needs to be paid to ensuring non-discrimination, and the equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by disabled persons, including their active participation in all aspects of society.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council 28/14 . Human rights, democracy and the rule of law (A/HRC/RES/28/14 ), 2015; Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council\* 19/36 Human rights, democracy and the rule of law (A/HRC/RES/19/36 ), 2019.

It is grounded in the premises of active social participation and the strengthening of democracies and human rights worldwide that this *UPR: A Practical Guide for Civil Society Coalitions to engage in implementation mechanisms* emerges. It aims to offer practical tools to national coalitions working within the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism so that, collectively, they can act with greater legitimacy and representativeness in their advocacy before national and international communities.

Beyond legitimacy, we argue that collective action provides several advantages, such as:

- a)** promoting more efficient use of material and human resources;
- b)** broadening the inclusion and visibility of organizations with less access to international forums;
- c)** bringing greater attention to social and human rights issues often rendered invisible by political selectivity;
- d)** encouraging the exchange of knowledge, good practices, and technical capacities among civil society organizations; and
- e)** strengthening dialogue channels with strategic



# 02


## THE UPR CYCLE + “PHASES” FOR SOCIAL PARTICIPATION



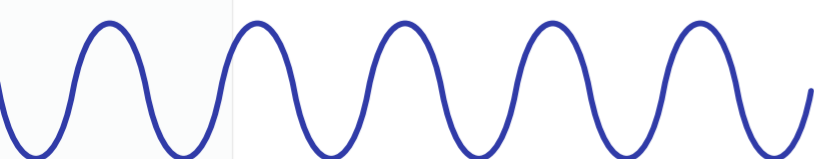
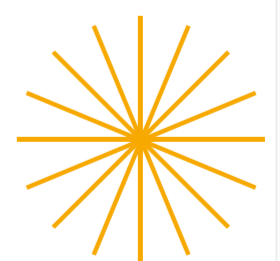
stakeholders at national and international levels.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is one of the main human rights mechanisms of the United Nations, created in 2006 by General Assembly Resolution 60/251 (A/RES/60/251) and conducted by the Human Rights Council. Its purpose is to periodically assess all UN Member States regarding their compliance with human rights obligations, in cycles of approximately five years. Launched in 2008, after the mechanism's working methods were defined (A/HRC/RES/5/1), the UPR has already completed three review cycles and produced more than 90,000 recommendations. The fourth

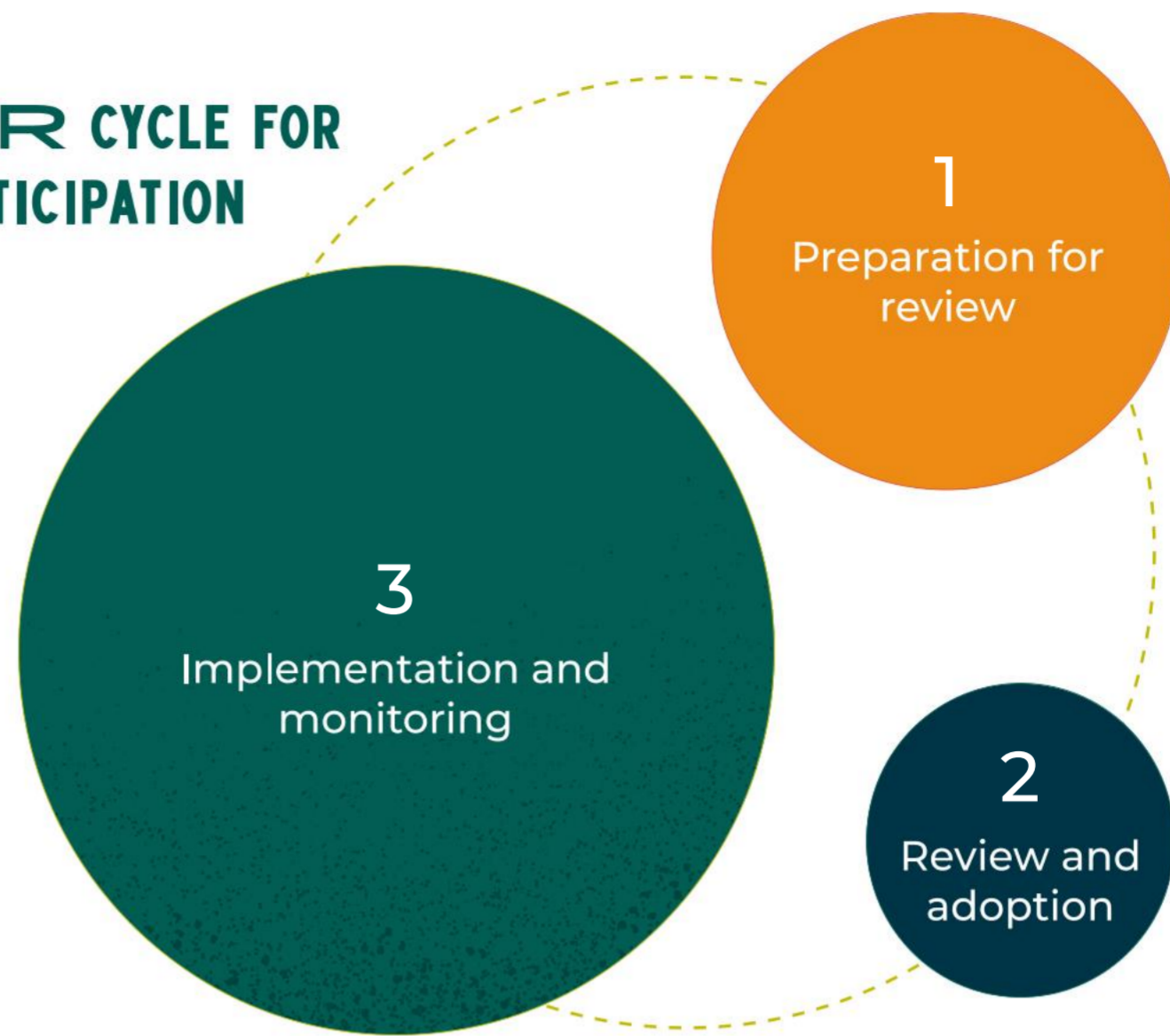


[Access “UPR: Practical Guide for Civil Society to Build National Coalitions” to learn more about how the UPR works and the phases of State reviews.](#) 

Although civil society does not draft recommendations to States during the UPR process, there are several opportunities for engagement throughout the cycle that can influence its outcome. In addition to the most widely used and well-known form of advocacy - the submission of parallel reports at the beginning and midpoint of the cycle - civil society can engage throughout the entire UPR process. We understand that there are three main phases for this participation: **1. Preparation for the review; 2. Review and adoption; and 3. Implementation and monitoring.**



## THE UPR CYCLE FOR SOCIAL PARTICIPATION



cycle, initiated in 2022, is expected to be concluded in 2027.

**Phase 1** - Preparation for the review consists of actions taken by civil society to prepare the end-of-cycle report, assessing how the previous cycle was implemented, and to advocate for new recommendations before States.

**Phase 2** - Review and adoption involves following the interactive dialogue and engaging nationally with the State so that it accepts or notes the recommendations received.

**Phase 3** - Implementation and monitoring comprises all actions taken from the moment recommendations are accepted and throughout the following years, with a view to ensuring their implementation, as well as monitoring the State's actions.

As addressed in the Practical Guide mentioned above, creating a National UPR Coalition requires mobilizing national civil society so that it becomes aware of the strategic role of the UPR, coordinated around common participation goals, and prepared to systematically and collectively advocate throughout the different phases of the UPR.

Once a National UPR Coalition is established, it is important to understand how this coalition can act strategically to mobilize the State and other actors involved in the implementation of

# 03

## COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY AT THE UPR

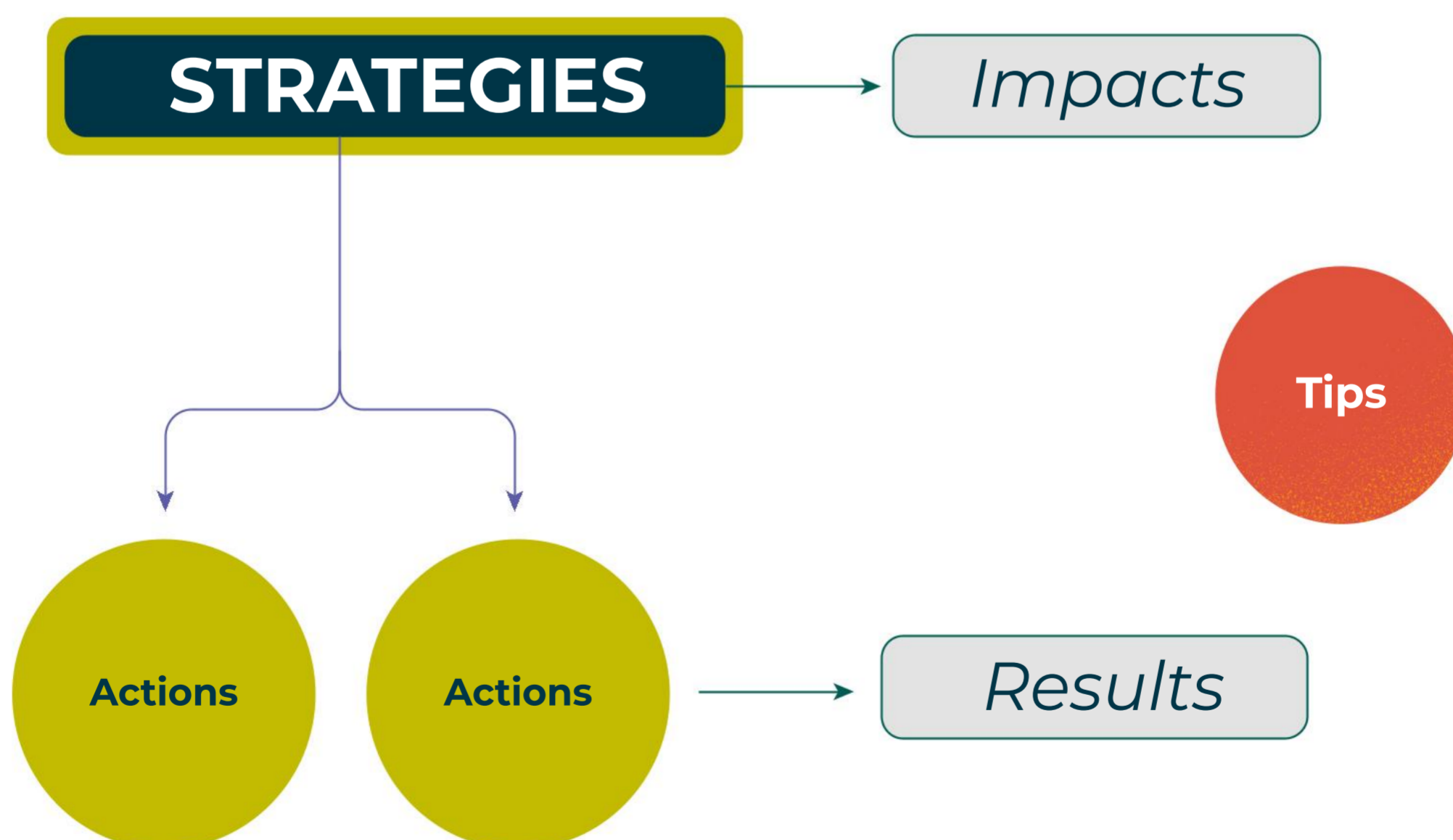


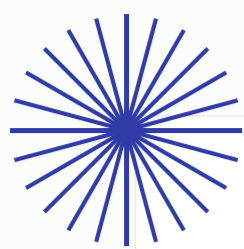
international human rights recommendations.

We prepared this chapter with the aim of supporting UPR national coalitions to reflect on their work in a systemic, strategic, and intentional manner. We recognize that each country and context have their own characteristics and demands, which may lead to different approaches and working methods. Even so, we hope that this chapter contributes to the process of reflection and collective building, which lies at the core of the work carried out by UPR national coalitions.

As shown in the illustration below, we present a framework of action for UPR national coalitions, structured around the definition of **STRATEGIES**. Each strategy is accompanied by its expected **IMPACTS** and a set of possible **ACTIONS** to achieve the proposed **RESULTS**.

In parallel, we highlight practical tips that can be applied both to specific actions and transversally across the different



**STRATEGY****1**

Coordinate and support the collective engagement of civil society in international human rights advocacy

**Impacts**

- Increased representativeness and legitimacy in international human rights advocacy
- Improved advocacy through the optimized use of human and material resources
- Better alignment of actions

**ACTION(S)****RESULTS**

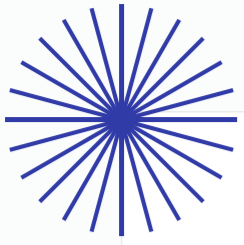
- Regular meetings (online and in-person)

- Conduct annual action planning (preferably in person) and keep the group updated throughout the year (even through virtual meetings)
- If held in person, create opportunities for local-level advocacy, thereby strengthening coordination at the domestic level

- Deliver oral/written statements at UN/HRC sessions (Speak under Item 6 (UPR) or other relevant agenda items)

- Keep the UPR and the implementation of State recommendations on the international political agenda



**ACTION(S)**

- Attend to the UPR-Info pre-session

- Advocacy with other UN mechanisms

**RESULTS**

- Give visibility to key issues that should be recommended by States

- Use assessments prepared for the UPR as advocacy tools with other UN mechanisms scheduled to visit the country (Special Procedures) or undergoing a review (Treaty Bodies)

**TIP**

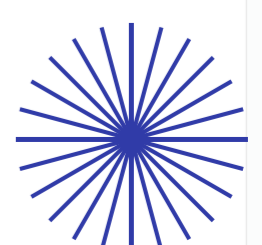
- Hold meetings with new organizations or new representatives within the UPR national coalition to integrate them into the group, explaining the coalition's working methods and internal organization.

**STRATEGY****2**

Expand access to information and transparency regarding international human rights commitments

**Impacts**

Greater awareness and understanding among national civil society about international human rights commitments



**ACTION(S)**



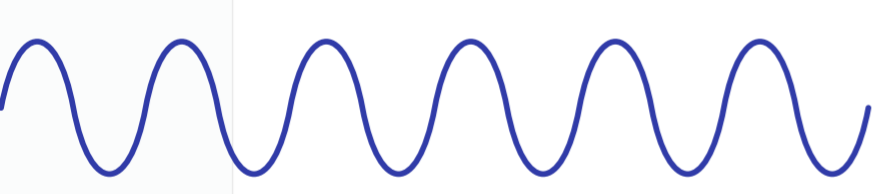
**RESULTS**

- Create a website to disseminate the recommendations received by the country in the UPR, as well as publications and information about the UPR national coalition

- Support the dissemination of UPR recommendations, publicize the coalition’s publications, and make its composition, admission procedures, activities, and contact information publicly available

- Training on the UPR

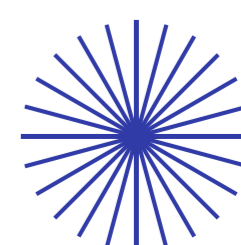
- Train new organizations within the UPR national coalition on how the UPR mechanism works, its history, and the coalition’s methods of action (awareness-raising)



**STRATEGY**

**3**

Localize international obligations - translate, adapt, and implement, within a country’s domestic context, the human rights commitments undertaken at the international level, in a way that respects the realities and lived experiences of diverse communities and groups



## Impacts

- Promote local human rights policies that are more consistent with international commitments
- Improve coordination between domestic policies and international standards/guidelines (building bridges)

### ACTION(S)



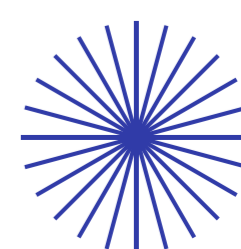
### RESULTS

- Draft public letters/position statements to communicate to the State the coalition's views on issues such as the acceptance or noting of recommendations during the period between the interactive dialogue and the adoption at the UN HRC session

- Influence the commitments the State will assume in the UPR and ensure they align with civil society's expectations regarding the implementation of human rights in the territories (e.g., take note of recommendations on traditional family or abortion).

- Use monitoring reports and new UPR recommendations for advocacy in legislative proposals and other actions at the national and local levels

- Contribute to the implementation of local human rights policies, for example, through municipal and state human rights plans
- Highlight gaps in the implementation of international human rights obligations



**STRATEGY****4**

Monitor and periodically assess the implementation of international recommendations

**Impacts**

- Map progress during the cycle or at its conclusion to guide advocacy with States and inform the broader public about human rights
- Build trust, credibility, and legitimacy with relevant actors at the national and international levels

**ACTION(S)****RESULTS**

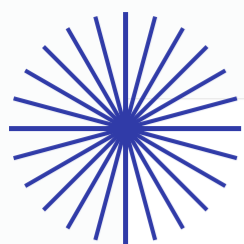
- Preparation of an assessment report on the implementation of recommendations

- Evaluate the status of implementation of recommendations from the cycle
- At the beginning of the UPR cycle, suggest recommendations to States for the next review
- At the UPR cycle's midterm, identify areas requiring attention before the next review cycle

**STRATEGY****5**

Monitor international obligations domestically by participating in consultation and dialogue spaces with civil society within the State





## Impacts

- Strengthen the implementation of international obligations and formal spaces for dialogue at the national and international levels

### ACTION(S)



### RESULTS

- Participate in consultations on the drafting of the national report for the UPR

- Become familiar with the content of the State’s report and the methodology used to gather data among the responsible institutions
- Advocate for the State to include relevant and updated information on the human rights situation on the ground

- Participation in events

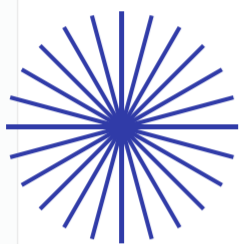
- Encourage member organizations to disseminate information - both to civil society groups that are not yet familiar with or engaged in the process, and regarding data from reports and other publications of the UPR national coalition

- Promote the organization of joint public hearings or follow-up meetings

- Give visibility to the assessments conducted by the coalition
- Pressure the State to develop its own methodology for assessment/ follow-up, in dialogue with the one carried out by the coalition

**TIP**

Maintaining close dialogue with the country's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), when one exists, is essential to strengthening the national implementation of international obligations and fostering coordinated action between the State and civil society.



A National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) is a State administrative body mandated to protect and promote human rights (CARDENAS, 2014, p. 7). NHRIs operate in accordance with the Paris Principles (UN General Assembly Resolution 48/134), which set out minimum standards for their functioning. They should have the broadest possible human rights mandate, be established through constitutional or legislative provisions, and carry out a wide range of responsibilities related to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Among these responsibilities, a key role is serving as a bridge between the State and civil society. As democratic institutions dedicated to the defense of human rights, they are expected to maintain ongoing dialogue with the population and to reflect diversity within their composition. These elements - plurality, autonomy, and mechanisms for social participation - enable such institutions to be formal enough to present and demand responses from the State, yet sufficiently informal to remain close to the population and adopt innovations that expand social participation (GOODMAN; PEGRAM, 2012, p. 218).



**STRATEGY****6**

Mobilize relevant international actors for human rights monitoring in international mechanisms/spaces (dialogue channels)

**Impact**

Become a relevant voice in the public debate

**ACTION(S)**

- Dialogue roundtable with diplomatic representations in the country

**RESULTS**

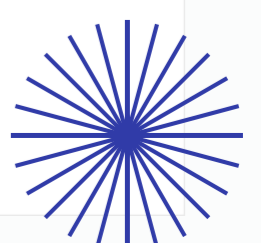
- During the implementation/ follow-up phase: Draw the attention of States that have already issued recommendations regarding the status of their implementation, and suggest recommendations these States could make to the State under Review (SuR).

- During the preparation phase: Influence the development of new recommendations on the issues being advocated for - tools to pressure the State

- Organization of side events during HRC/UN Sessions and other national/ international seminars/events

- Draw the attention of States and civil society to the human rights situation in the country, especially when mid-term or end-of-cycle reports are being released/ disseminated

- Bring visibility to assessments on human rights/UPR recommendations for national and international civil society



**ACTION(S)****RESULTS**

- Preparation of a periodic bulletin on the status of recommendation implementation for embassies/ permanent missions

- Inform each State that issued recommendations about whether and how they are being implemented, with the aim of creating a channel for dialogue, information sharing, and recommendation suggestions for the next review cycle.

**STRATEGY****7**

Engage with the National Mechanism for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRF)

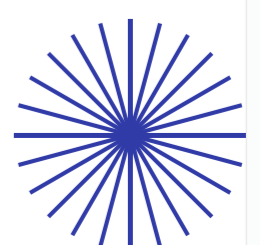
**Impacts**

Strengthen social participation in the domestic monitoring and implementation of international obligations, in dialogue with this type of State mechanism.

**ACTION(S)****RESULTS**

- Monitor updates to information provided by NMIRFs through digital human rights platforms and, when permitted, submit alternative information organized by the coalition

- Encourage the use and regular updating of these platforms by States that already have them, to promote greater accountability regarding what has been done in terms of implementation and to facilitate the prioritization of thematic clusters for follow-up



**ACTION(S)****RESULTS**

- Participate in meetings or public hearings to monitor the implementation of recommendations, with the participation of NMIRF focal points

- Create opportunities to publicly discuss the implementation of recommendations, such as through hearings, including debates on developing indicators to track progress integrated into Human Rights Action Plans - whether national, thematic, or local
- Disseminate reports and documents prepared by the coalition

**What are NMIRFs?**

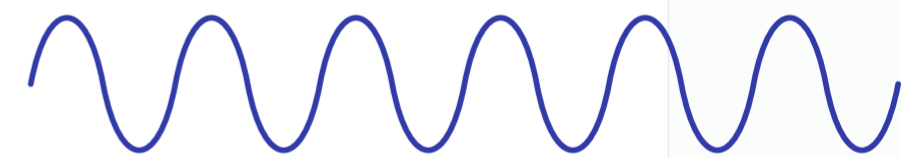
Public structures - usually permanent or *ad hoc* committees - composed of focal points from State institutions responsible for implementing and monitoring international human rights obligations at the national level. NMIRFs serve to facilitate coordination and inter-institutional dialogue for the preparation of reports for international human rights mechanisms and for monitoring the implementation of recommendations issued by these mechanisms. Some operate with digital human rights tools that organize recommendations and facilitate implementation tracking, such as Paraguay's SIMORE Plus.

Within the UPR, NMIRFs can serve as a strategic space for dialogue with the State throughout the entire review cycle, not only during consultations for the preparation of the national reports at the beginning and midterm stages.

During the phase of recommendation implementation between one cycle and the next, NMIRFs can function as the venue for continuously monitoring progress or challenges in implementation - by convening public hearings, pressing for the collection and dissemination of data at all levels of State governance through digital platforms, releasing periodic reports in line with the UPR calendar, or proposing and monitoring the development of National Human Rights Action Plans (NHRAPs) with feasible goals, objectives, priorities, and timelines.

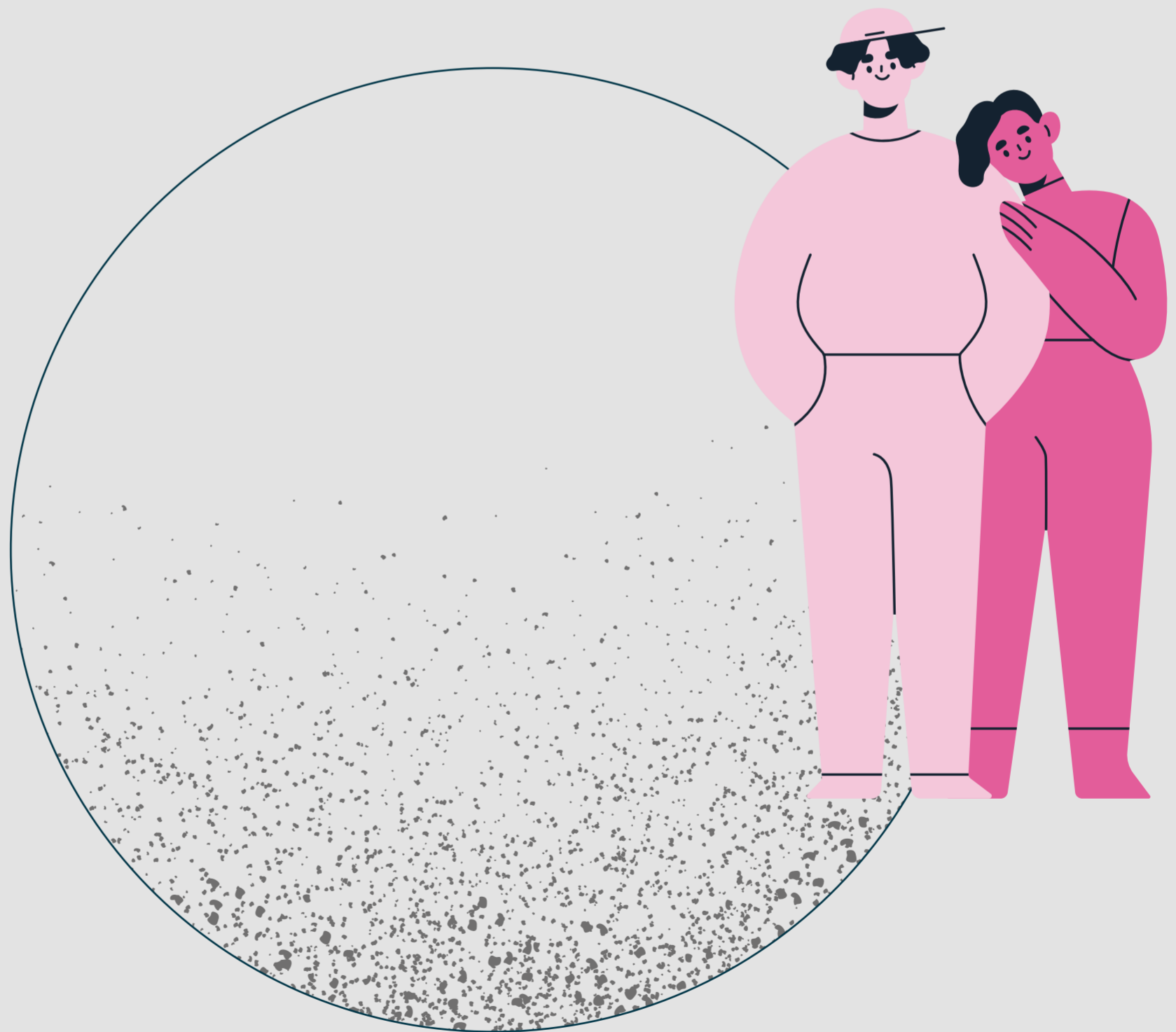


Learn about the proposal on social participation in NMIRFs, developed from suggestions by Latin American and Caribbean civil society: [Spanish](#) · [English](#) · [Portuguese](#)



# 04

## ANNEX: THE UPR LATIN AMERICA COALITION



## Annex: the UPR Latin America Coalition

Currently, several countries around the world have UPR national coalitions formed by civil society to coordinate their engagement with the mechanism. However, an innovative experience has been taking shape in Latin America, where civil society organizations and UPR national coalitions have mobilized to build and strengthen a Regional UPR Coalition, aimed at exchanging knowledge, promoting coordination, and conducting joint advocacy in international human rights processes.

Below, we briefly present the pioneering experience of this Regional Coalition, which has been opening new paths for the integration and strengthening of civil society participation in the UPR.

The UPR Latin America Coalition is a regional coalition whose purpose is to exchange good advocacy practices within the framework of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and to strengthen the work of national coalitions dedicated to monitoring and implementing UPR recommendations in their respective countries.

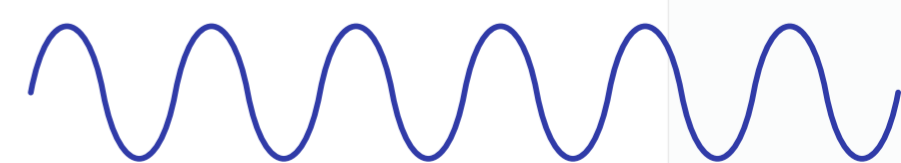
The Coalition was created in November 2021, at the end of the 3rd UPR cycle (2017–2022), under the coordination of the [Institute for Development and Human Rights \(IDDH\)](#).

The group meets annually and was initially composed of civil society organizations from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. It also includes consolidated UPR national coalitions such as the [UPR Brazil Coalition](#), the Colectivo EPU Perú, and civil society coalitions from Bolivia (led by [Comunidad de Derechos Humanos](#)) and Uruguay (led by [ANONG](#)).

Since its creation, the Coalition has carried out advocacy actions in spaces such as the UN Human Rights Council - including oral statements under Item 6, dedicated to the UPR — and, more recently, also before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), with the request for and participation in a thematic hearing during its 191st period of sessions.

In addition to its UPR focus, the group also works to strengthen National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRFs) - known in the region by names such as SIMORE or MNIDI - recognizing the potential of these tools to ensure greater accountability and transparency in the implementation of international recommendations by States.

In October 2025, during an in-person meeting held in Santiago with the support of the OHCHR Regional Office in Chile, the group welcomed the participation of organizations and UPR national coalitions from countries such as Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and Panama. This regional exchange motivated the decision to expand the group - previously known as the UPR South America Coalition - to the UPR Latin America Coalition. This expansion reflects a shared conviction: civil society must continue strengthening its collective efforts to monitor, follow up, and hold States accountable for fulfilling and implementing their human rights obligations - whether through national, regional, or international strategies!



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